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Salvatore Cosentino

Ravenna from imperial residence to episcopal city: processes of centrality across empires

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Abstract

From Late Antiquity to the early Middle Ages, two basic factor shaped Ravenna's ability to influence a much more extensive space than its natural hinterland. The first was its establishment as an imperial residence the second was its location within the northern Adriatic basin, which had since Antiquity been a crossroads for peoples, trade and cultures. Just on the basis of the support it received from the imperial power, its episcopate was elevated to one of the most important sees of Italy. By means of the large international harbour of Classe, from the 5th to the 7th centuries the city imported products from around the entire Mediterranean. With the arrival of the Byzantine government, the ties between the port of Classe and the other Mediterranean export centres shifted by moving from West to East. Moreover, the relationship with Constantinople reaffirmed the political and ecclesiastical importance of Ravenna. As long as these ties remained strong, Ravenna retained a vital contact to the other maritime Mediterranean trade centres. The twilight of Byzantine rule did not cause the decline of the city, but rather a progressive turn of its ruling class toward the political scenario of the medieval West. By virtue of being the management centre of the *patrimonium beati Apollinaris*, the city remained wealthy and influential well beyond the 9th century. This was due both to the economic power of its archbishops and to their alliance with the Ottonians and then later with the Salian and Swabian emperors. The trajectories of the political centrality of Ravenna from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages were, therefore, deeply influenced by the dynamic of successive empires, which, in one form or another, were all connected or attempted to reconnect to the memory of its Roman past.

Salvatore Cosentino

Ravenna from imperial residence to episcopal city: processes of centrality across empires

The combination of city and centrality is a hendiadys in the studies that have attempted to present the urban phenomenon[1] via historical models. The primitive features of ancient urbanism have been generally pointed out in an agglomeration of population, concentration of production activities and exercise of forms of political or religious power.[2] However, the effectiveness that this combination of factors confers to a particular settlement in bringing out its urban shape is measured primarily in terms of its capacity to condition the space around it. The greater the will any given human agglomeration has to exercise its influence over an area, the stronger its drive toward centrality. It is evident from this premise that the term »city« would not exist without that of »territory«. The Roman administrative culture was fully aware of this distinction, given that the bulk of the *municipium* was not legally separated from the district around it.[3] A poleo-genesis always implies a choro-genesis. However, though deeply interrelated, the cultural, social and economic morphologies of urbanism are different than those of the countryside, as the characters of centrality are different in respect to those of the periphery. Ravenna, in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, is no exception to this theoretical premise. Looking at its history by means of the approach proposed in this paper, we can trace out three main evolutionary phases of its urban trajectory: the first extends from its selection as the western imperial residence until the eastern Roman conquest, the second from ca. 540 to the late 7th century, and, finally, from the early 8th century to the middle of the 9th century.

Honorius's decision to move his residence from Milan to Ravenna, between March and the beginning of December 402,[4] was the result of a political practice that had its roots in the distant age of the *Soldatenkaiser*. For the 3rd century emperors, the necessity to be able to move across the Roman borders involved being better able to cope with the changing situations of military conflict and led to the emergence of a court apparatus (*comitatus*) characterised by its mobility.[5] Several imperial residences arose during this period (i. e., Trier, Milan, Sirmium, Antioch, and then, during the Tetrarchy, Nicomedia, Thessalonica, and Serdica); each one featured a recurring typology of monumental buildings that made them apt to exercise their role as *sedes imperii*.[6] During the 4th century, Ravenna experienced sporadic events foreshadowing its leading role in the form of stays by Diocletian in 304, Severus in 306, Constantius II in 357, Valentinian I in 365, Valentinian II in 378 and Honorius in 399.[7] However, the decision made by the latter in 402 (beyond the specific political and military contingencies in which it matured) must have been influenced by the century-old character of centrality, which were peculiar not just to the city, but to the whole area of the northern Adriatic as well. As Michel Reddé clarified in one of his contributions, the creation of the military port of Classe had been planned by Augustus with the intention of making Ravenna the staging point of a military itinerary, which through the lagoons, Aquileia, the Noricum and Pannonia ended in *Carnuntum* (near present-day Vienna) on the Danube.[8] During the *Principate*, the strategic importance of the northern Adriatic rim increased; it

1 See, for instance, the entry »City« by Roncayolo (1978).
2 *Ibid*. 3–7, 26–31.
3 See the limpid essay by Liebeschuetz (1992), esp. 1–3.
4 Honorius made his decision between March and 6 December 402: Neri (1990) 536.
5 Regarding the mobility of the *comitatus*, see the recent contribution by Porena (2010), esp. 525–536.
6 For a comparison, see the book by Ripoll / Gurt (eds) (2000); see also the *Introduction* in Grig / Kelly (2012) 6–8.
7 Concerning these stays and their documentation in the sources, see Neri (1990) 541–543.
8 Reddé (2001), part. 43–45.

essentially became the hinge for control of the inland Danube, the Po valley and the sea routes towards the Aegean. In the context of the 4th century processes of high military, ethnic and economic mobility between the Balkans and northern Italy, the role of Ravenna as the pivot point of the imperial coordination on the *pars Occidentis* was quite clear to Honorius's counsellors. The Adriatic city, therefore, was credited with a role of political leadership *vis-à-vis* the decline of the two other major centres of the same interregional theatre, i. e., Milan and Aquileia.[9]

In an article from 2001, Andrew Gillett argued that Ravenna served as the main Roman residence in the West only between 408 and 440, whereas between 450 and 476 Rome was the centre of imperial presence »in partibus Occidentis«.[10] Ravenna would have regained its centrality only later, starting from the time of the Odoacer regime.[11] In his analysis, Gillett concluded that the supposed role of Ravenna as capital, far from being only a simple inaccuracy of detail, conceals the fact that during the 5th century Rome enjoyed a renewed status as the imperial capital from the point of view of political perception, exercise of power and ideological importance. One can agree with such a conclusion, but only on the condition that some clarification is provided. Under the profile of cultural and political imagery, Rome, despite the fact that emperors resided in other centres as well, had remained the imperial city *par excellence* throughout the 4th century. Its incumbent past conditioned the formation and character of all the alternative *sedes regiae*. Even in the case of the city founded by Constantine, it has been claimed that the historian looks for Constantinople in the sources, but he always finds Rome (G. Dagron).[12] It took more than one-and-a-half centuries until the new imperial residence established in the East became a *basileuousa polis*. With regards to the presence of the western emperors in Ravenna, it is important to remember that out of nine rulers ascending the throne between 455 and 476, four were crowned in Ravenna (Majorian, Libius Severus, Glycerius and Romulus),[13] four in Rome (Petronius Maximus, Anthemius, Olybrius and Julius Nepos)[14] and one in Toulouse (Avitus).[15] Regarding those elected in Rome, only Petronius Maximus and Anthemius might have entertained the idea of, again, bestowing the *Urbs* with a new exclusivity as capital.

If we ask whether Ravenna, once it became an imperial residence, supplanted the role of Rome as the centre from which the arcane elements of power originated in the collective imagery of Late Antiquity, the answer is certainly negative. If, however, we wonder to what extent Honorius's decision to move his residence in Ravenna had a real impact on the future urban and socio-economic structure of the Adriatic city and its relationship with the two *partes* of the empire, it is hard not to give a positive response. While the western emperors of the 5th century also frequently moved between Ravenna and Rome, there is, nevertheless, solid evidence that palatine bureaucracy permanently resided in the former.[16] It is during the first half of the 5th century that a series of monumental structures were built in Ravenna (the city walls, palatial complex, circus and mint) and thus bring it up to par with the previous imperial residences. As in other cities of the empire, in Ravenna the imperial palace was not a single edifice, but comprised an aggregate of buildings and pavilions constructed between the second third of the 5th to the beginning of the 6th centuries in the southeastern sector of the city. Despite the fact that Honorius resided in Ravenna almost continuously from 408 until his death (27 August 423), there is no precise information in the sources regarding his Ravennate residence.[17] One can tentatively hypothesise that he might have re-utilised and enlarged the spaces of a 4th century urban villa on the same site later occupied by the palace of Theode-

9 Neri (1990) 535–539, who stresses the decline of Milan in the framework of its antagonism with Rome; see also Mazza (2005), esp. 8–12.

10 Gillett (2001), esp. 131, 136, 146; see also (on the same line of Gillet), Humphries (2012) esp. 161–162.

11 Gillett (2001) and McEvoy (2010) (I agree with the renewed ceremonial importance of Rome in the 5th century, but I am sceptical about the role she assigned to the figure of the child-emperors). On Honorius's visit to Rome, see Lejdegård (2002) 45–59.

12 Dagron (1974) 43–61.

13 Gillett (2001) 150 (Majorian), 151 (Libius Severus), 154 (Glycerius), 155 (Romulus).

14 Gillett (2001) 148 (Petronius Maximus), 152 (Anthemius), 153 (Olybrius), 154 (Julius Nepos, but proclaimed as *caesar* in Ravenna).

15 Gillett (2001) 149.

16 See Cosentino, Two ministerial cities (forthcoming).

17 Our sole information comes from a passage by Agnellus *Lib. Pont.*, 35, in which he tells us that Honorius commissioned his *praepositus*, Lauricius, with the construction of a palace in Caesarea; instead, his official erected a church dedicated to St. Lawrence.

ric.[18] Agnellus of Ravenna states that Valentinianus III supported the construction of a residence »in loco qui dicitur ad Laureta« or »Laureti palatium«, in the southeastern zone of the city. Parts of the interior decoration of this edifice are described in two poems by Flavius Merobaude, who visited Ravenna in 435.[19] Just north of the Valentinian palace, Theoderic built a new residence, probably starting 510.[20] This palace is by far the most cited in the written sources and has also left meaningful archaeological remains.[21] Parts of it continued to be used by the exarchs. Its memory in the political imagery of the Ravennate society was still alive in the 11th century.[22] The city walls were probably constructed between 425 and 455 and incorporated structures of the preceding Roman fortifications only in the south-western sector.[23] The whole circuit measured approximately 4.5 km and enclosed an area of about 166 ha.[24] The consistent expansion of the fortified city's perimeter was not due to an expanding demographic (for the walls did not encircle the new residential quarters), but rather had to do with spaces possessing a marked public function such as the imperial complex and the circle. The latter was probably built at the same time as the city walls in the southeastern part of the city.[25] The urban position of the Ravennate mint is archaeologically disputed,[26] nevertheless, no one doubts that it was in operation starting sometime in the early 5th century.[27]

The political rise of Ravenna to the rank of imperial residence had significant repercussions for its church. Within the Italian ecclesiastical hierarchy, the status of the Ravennate see begins to rise starting from the second quarter of the 5th century. According to Agnellus,[28] Peter I Chrysologus (bishop from 432 to 450) was given metropolitan jurisdiction over 14 subordinate bishops by replacing the role the bishop of Milan had (up till this point) exercised over the dioceses of the *Italia annonaria*.[29] The sermon 175 by Peter Chrysologus confirms that, under his episcopate,

18 On which see below, notes 20 and 21.

19 See Fl. Merobaudis *Carmina* I–II, Vollmer (1905) 3–4 and the comments made by Mazza (1984), esp. 402–414; Piccinini (1992) 36; Baldini Lippolis (1997) 10–12.

20 The anonymous Valesii affirms that Theoderic »palatium usque ad perfectum fecit, quem non dedicavit« (*Exc. Val*., II, 71 ed. Moreau), which can be interpreted to mean that the king promoted and financed the building of the palace, but died before its formal inauguration. The latter event, therefore, must be placed after 5 April 526.

21 The so called »palace of Theoderic« presents several phases of construction and renovation, stretching from the early empire to the second half of the 6th century. Differences among archaeologists exist in dating its structures: for the latest publications, see Cirelli (2008) 83–81–85; Augenti (2007) 425–453; Russo (2005); Baldini (2001). Further bibliography on Theoderic palace and its representation in the famous mosaic of S. Apollinare Nuovo can be found in Deliyannis (2010) 119–122, and, above all, Carile (2012) 132–144.

22 See Porta (1991), esp. 273, n. 28.

23 The date is proposed by Christie / Gibson (1988), esp. 194, followed by Gelichi (2005) (with former bibliography), who, however, thinks (contrary to the British researchers) that the walls were built by making use of reuse materials (837). As far as chronology and phases of construction are concerned, Cirelli (2008) 54–67 sides with Gelichi's analysis.

24 Gelichi (2005) 830. Deliyannis (2010) 54 is inclined to think that the walls existed by the very early 5th century, in some way echoing the position of Fabbri (2004), who maintains that Ravenna had an expanded circuit of fortifications since the 4th century – and this would be the reason why Honorius chose the city as a residence. However, this interpretation has not adequately been demonstrated.

25 I find it difficult to follow Deliyannis's scepticism (Deliyannis [2010] 59) and, before her, that of Gillett (2001) 130, n. 133, both of whom cast doubts on the fact the Ravenna actually had a circus in Late Antiquity. Even admitting that the testimony by Sid. Apoll. *Carm*. XXIII, 304–427 ed. Loyen, refers to Rome and not to Ravenna – as it is clear – both Agnellus and different documents of the 10th century mention, or clearly imply, the existence of circus in the city: see Vespignani (2005), esp. 1141–1142. The problem is its location in the urban topography. The identification of its structures with the *stadium tabulae*, mentioned by Agnellus, northwards outside the city wall, which was proposed by Deichmann (1989) 40, is not compatible with the testimony of the *Liber Pontificalis* of Rome (*Lib. Pont*. I, 332 Duchesne), according to which, the head of Mauricius *chartularius* would have been placed on a pole in the Ravennate circus; in fact, this story implies that the circus was in a position that could easily be seen by many people, therefore, not outside the city. I am not convinced by the proposal made by Farioli Campanati (1992) 136 and later developed by Cirelli (2008) 90–91, according to which, the structure was located between the basilica of S. Agata Maggiore and the *platea maior*. Following a suggestion made by Testi Rasponi, also Johnson (1988) 83 places the circus in this area, however, with an east-west axis.

26 See the discussion in Augenti (2005).

27 For the Ravennate emissions under Honorius, see Kent (1994) 327–329, 331–336.

28 Agn., 40.

29 On the rise of the Church of Ravenna in the ecclesiastical geography of northern Italy, see Orselli (1992) 408–409; Zangara (2000), esp. 298–304; Deliyannis (2010), 84–85.

the Ravennate see was elevated to metropolitan status owing to an *edictum Caesaris* (that is, an act by Valentinian III) and a *decretum beati Petris* (a measure taken by Pope, Leo I).[30] The great period of ecclesiastical building activity in Ravenna starts with the erection of the churches of St. John the Evangelist and the Holy Cross (both constructed thanks to the patronage of Galla Placidia), and it continues with the basilica Ursiana, the episcopal palace and the Neonianus baptistery.[31] Around the cathedral, located in the southwestern part of the city, another pole of power, where the bishops lived, developed; it was joined to the imperial palace by means of a colonnaded street.[32] The arrival of the court in Ravenna, from an economic point of view, meant that the port of Classe took on new importance; between the 5th and the 7th centuries, it was the most important Italian commercial harbour along the routes between the peninsula and the central and eastern Mediterranean.[33] In Classe, the basilica Petriana was also built during the second quarter of the 5th century.[34]

With regards to the city, Odoacer and, after him, Theodoric followed much the same path traced out by the last Roman emperors in the West. While little is known about the activities of the former,[35] we have a great deal more information about the activities of the latter.[36] The Amal ruler's attitude towards urbanism was moulded in accordance with the traditional patterns of the imperial munificence, a »prudent ancient mask«, as his attitude has been characterised.[37] In Ravenna, he expanded the imperial residence by building new pavilions, restructured the city's water system and constructed the mysterious *basilica Herculis* – most likely, a civic edifice located in the so-called *regio Herculana*.[38] Moreover, he re-affirmed its administrative centrality within the kingdom. In this respect, the Ostrogothic exhibited a great deal of continuity with the social structures constituted in the first half of the 5th century. Almost without interruption, the senatorial aristocracy held the *praefectura praetorio* throughout the second third of the 5th century, yet without moving its residence to the capital.[39] Instead, Ravenna attracted a bureaucratic class of mid- and lower-level officers, who served in the palatine departments or in the royal *cubiculum*.[40] For this reason, a peculiar social class took root in the city involved either in the imperial administration or in technical professions tied to the court. It was characterised by a certain availability of money and by the ownership of small tracts of land.[41] This class is easily identifiable in the sources from the Justinian Age; however, it is quite likely that it formed at an earlier point in time, and that it originated within the particular socio-economic profile assumed by the new capital in the West over the course of the 5th century. We should avoid, however, overestimating the Ostrogothic period as the key moment in the promotion of the economic and urban upswing experienced by Ravenna in the 6th century. Of course, as already mentioned, Theodoric took care of his kingdom's capital city; it is also true that the larger ecclesiastical enterprises, e. g., St. Vitale or St. Apollinaris in Classe, were started under his rule. Nonetheless, it should be remembered that both churches were completed under the Byzantine government, and that the Ostrogothic king did not play a role in financing their construction.

In May of 540, Ravenna was integrated into the institutional framework of the eastern Roman empire. This new position gave the city a Janus-faced appearance regarding the problem of its centrality. On the one hand, the Adriatic centre had, indeed, become a peripheral city of an empire that had its capital thousands of miles away from it, yet, on the other, the new regime confirmed its dominant role on the Italian scene. From the second half of the 6th century, Ravenna began

30 Petri Chrysol. *Collectio sermonum a Felice episcopo parata* (ed. Olivar 1982) 1066.

31 Deliyannis (2010) 63–74, 84–101. I am in agreement with D. Deliyannis (ivi 86) in locating the episcopate of Ursus between 405 and 431.

32 See Farioli Campanati (1992) 144.

33 See Augenti (2013) (with former bibliography).

34 Augenti (2013) 229.

35 See Cesa (1994), (2001); Henning (1999) 58–70, 104–111, 178–187, 209–212, 332–334.

36 The literature on Theoderic's figure and his reign is immense; I limited myself to quoting: W. Ensslin (1959); Moorhead (1992); Teoderico il Grande e i Goti d'Italia (1993); Azzara (2013).

37 The quotation is taken from La Rocca (1993); other important essays on Theoderic's building policy in Italy include Johnson (1988) and Fauvinet-Ranson (2006), esp. 255–282.

38 Deliyannis (2010) 119–124.

39 Pietri (1991) 290–291; Cosentino, Two ministerial cities (forthcoming).

40 Pietri (1991) 293–296.

41 See Cosentino (1999).

propagating notions of political authority and organisational models coming from Constantinople, which, at least to an extent, mingled with the historical experiences of its own past as capital of the western Roman empire. It is precisely the degree of cultural transformation – in a broader sense – experienced by its society when the city was inserted into the Byzantine community that was debated amongst scholars, especially in the 80s and 90s of the last century.[42] Historians wondered whether, from this period onwards, a new identity of the Ravennate society was emerging whose content can be distinguished from those of the preceding century. The debate focused mainly on three aspects: (1) the extent of immigration from Constantinople; (2) the diffusion of Greek language in the local society; (3) the degree of entrenchment of institutions and devotional practices being typical of the eastern part of the Roman Empire. Cornerstone concepts of social behaviour, such as the ideology of sacred kingship or the economic practices centred on land investment, were peculiar features both of the West and the East during Late Antiquity. It is clear that in these fields it is difficult to highlight elements of differentiation between late antique and Byzantine Ravenna. However, there are a certain number of political, social and economic factors, the effects of which on the history of the city during the second half of the 6th century cannot be regarded as mere epiphenomena of the former dynamics of the late Roman world. The constitution of the Exarchate (ca. 584[43]) bestowed a new content to the political relations between Ravenna and Rome. During the 5th century, there was no real predominance of the former over the latter; instead, a pronounced antagonism existed between the different leading classes of the two cities: the bureaucrats in Ravenna and the senatorial aristocracy in Rome. Both Odoacer and Theodoric aimed at coordinating their actions with the Senate. But when the representatives of the *mos maiorum* disappeared, because of their decimation during the Greek-Gothic war or their emigration to Constantinople, Ravenna was in a position to exercise hegemony over the ancient capital that it had never experienced since becoming an imperial residence.[44] This hegemony throughout the 7th century occasionally had authoritarian implications, as in the case of exarch Isacius's repression of those Roman notables who had supported the uprising of the *chartularius* Mauricius in 642.[45] Furthermore, the bishop of Rome was much more exposed within the context of this new situation vis-à-vis Constantinople and Ravenna, for the papacy had played a role in the reconfiguration of the Roman ruling classes during the 7th century. This is true not only with regard to the opposition to monothelitism carried out by the papacy and, to a much lesser extent, by the Church of Ravenna, but it also appears to hold true for the Roman military aristocracy of the early Middle Ages, some of whose members during the 8th century belonged to a militia operated directly under the Pope's direction.[46]

Right from the beginning of Justinian's reign, the Byzantine government consistently encouraged a partnership with the Ravennate bishops in order to consolidate the political consensus towards the new regime in Italy.[47] This attitude, on the one hand, increased the capacity by which Ravenna could effectively exercise a function politically centripetal on the peninsula. On the other hand, it constituted a source of tension between the two ecclesiastical sees – namely, Rome and Ravenna. It is possible that economic concessions to the bishops of the latter were already being made by Valentinian III. The privilege handed down in the *codex Estensis* 371 (the same manuscript preserving the work of Agnellus) is definitely a forgery produced probably sometime during the 7th century.[48] Nevertheless, we cannot exclude the possibility that it mirrored some distorted reality, especially in light of the fact that the Church of Ravenna, indeed, extended the area of its ecclesiastical jurisdiction to a large part of the Aemilia

42 Among the most meaningful essays of this debate, the following contributions can be mentioned: Guillou (1969); Carile (1983); Brown (1984); Borodin (1986); Brown (1988); Brown/Christie (1989); Borodin (1991); Brown (1991); Guillou (1991) 103–108; Lazard (1991); Carile (1992b).

43 On the formation of the exarchate, see Cosentino (2008) 135–137.

44 On the demise of the Roman senatorial aristocracy during the 6th century, see Brown (1984) 27–34; von Falkenhausen (1985); Bjornlie (2013) 144–147 (on the Anicii).

45 On which see Cosentino (1993).

46 See Di Carpegna Falconieri (2012).

47 Brown (1979).

48 See Guillou (1969) 168.

under Valentinian III.[49] In any case, the support provided by the eastern Roman emperors to the Church of Ravenna cannot be compared in regards to its consistency with the positive attitude already displayed towards it by the western emperors and barbaric kings in the 5th century. In fact, this situation underwent a substantial change compared to that of Late Antiquity. It is worth briefly listing the concessions made by the *basileis* to the Ravennate see. In the 520s, the estates of the church yielded an estimated total yearly income of around 17,000 *solidi*. The level of income grew significantly as a result of two imperial donations: the first was made by Justinian to Bishop Victor (ca. 537 – ca. 544), and the second by the same Justinian, or by Justin II, to archbishop Agnellus (557–570). In the meanwhile, Justinian had raised the see to an archiepiscopal status during the episcopate of Maximian (546–557). In the middle of the 7th century, the landed patrimony of the Blessed Apollinaris yielded an income of at least 70,000 *solidi*.[50] While the whole Italian society was impoverished, the Church of Ravenna had quadrupled its fortune thanks to the decisive munificence of the eastern Roman emperors. Major concessions were made by Constans II between 650 and 666 (and then confirmed in 666), which included fiscal privileges and the ecclesiastic autonomy from Rome. They were reconfirmed by Constantine IV, probably between 669 and 674.[51]

While the social and economic profile held by the Adriatic capital between the 6th and 7th centuries does exhibit some continuity of experience stemming from the 5th century, it also gave rise to new situations. The city continued to have a relatively low number of inhabitants. While it has been suggested that throughout the Justinian Age the conurbation Ravenna, Caesarea and Classe never exceeded a population of over 10,000 inhabitants,[52] the social groups that did live there, on the whole, had substantial resources. With the exception of the Archbishop of Ravenna, our sources do not reveal any families possessing large tracts of land.[53] Land ownership is divided among individuals of low and mid-level status consisting of soldiers, bureaucrats, artisans, merchants, clerics and *tabelliones*. Unlike the archbishops of Ravenna (who had estates distributed throughout Istria, Romagna, Marche, Umbria, Campania, Calabria and Sicily[54]), soldiers, low-ranking officials and the so-called *viri honesti* possessed only modest plots of land located primarily in Romagna and northern Marche.[55] The establishment of a mint in the city, the maintenance of the court as well as the payment of bureaucracy and army made Ravenna one of the most important financial centres of the entire late Roman Mediterranean.[56] The circulation of the monetary economy reached its peak in the second third of the 6th century; a period in which the entire empire appears to be prosperous. A meaningful indication of the financing activities that took place in Ravenna is represented by the *argentarii*. Despite the fact that in the mid-6th century Rome had a population probably ten times higher than Ravenna, the latter had 13 *argentarii* compared to only 4 in Rome.[57] This figure cannot be random and is to be explained in the light of the factors already mentioned: a large abundance of gold, silver and bronze currency fuelled by the activity of the mint, the constant demand for goods and services connected with operating structures of the state as well as the presence of the international harbour (Classe) – whose function I shall return to later.

Concerning the social consequences associated with the conquest of Ravenna by Belisarius in 540, scholars have, above all, debated about the transformation of the city's ethnic composition. Two contrary perspectives have emerged. While the first suggests that the Greek community increased significantly after the destruction of the Ostrogothic kingdom (proposed by A. Guillou and S. Lazard), the other tends to minimise the increase in the Greek speaking population after the Byzantine conquest (proposed by T. S. Brown).[58] Today the results of a decade of new excavations at the site of

49 See above, note 29.
50 Figures are taken from Brown (1979) and Cosentino (2012c), esp. 421–422.
51 Regarding the donations made by Constans II and Constantine IV: Cosentino (2014).
52 Cosentino (2005) 406–413.
53 *Ibid*., 430.
54 Fasoli (1991).
55 On the *viri honesti*, see above, note 41.
56 See Cosentino (2006).
57 *Ibidem*.
58 Concerning this problem, see the *mise au point* by Cosentino (2012) (with former bibliography).

Classe enable us to expand the perspective of the debate by considering trade trends of the time. The import of supplies, pottery, textiles and military equipment, associated with the needs of the public apparatus, all arrived from multiple sites of production at the port of Classe: wheat from Istria, Sicily and Africa; oil from Istria, Syria and Tunisia (LR1, Keay IX, Keay XXVI, LVI Keay, Keay LVII); wine from Romagna, Calabria, Chios, Palestine, Samos, Sardis and Alexandria (LR2, LR 3 , LR4, LR 5/6, LR 7, Keay LII, Agora M273).[59] Until the mid-6th century, the amphorae came largely from Africa, however, starting in the Justinian Age, they also began flowing in large quantities from the eastern Mediterranean. About a few issues, we have little information and can, therefore, only speculate that they had to come from Padania, the Balkans (raw wool) and Puglia (finest wools and purple robes).[60] Moreover, at least in the 6th century (but certainly well before this period), some qualities of silk must surely have come from Syria.[61] Products aimed at addressing the needs of the public apparatus, however, were not only consumed within Ravenna and its urban district. In fact, some surveys seem to show that Ravenna as a centre had a marked vocation for a commercial distribution both along the Po Valley and the neighbouring towns along the Adriatic coast. While Ravenna was, without a doubt, a place of production and consumption, distribution was certainly prevalent among its economic functions.

The third phase of the relationship between Ravenna and the theme of its centrality within the Italian context begins towards the end of the 7th century. Already one-and-a-half centuries before the conquest of the Exarchate by the Lombard king, Aistulf, the power of the exarch had been narrowing the area of its efficacy to Romagna and Pentapolis. The end of the 7th century saw a strengthening of the local dukes, who continued to weaken the ability of the exarch to assert his authority across Byzantine Italy. This process, in Venice, Rome and Naples, is reflected in the composition of regional chronicles, in which the election of the *dux* is no longer delegated to the exarchal institution, but is assigned directly to the ratification of the emperor.[62] The last Italian exarch mentioned in the sources, Eutychius, had to ask for the intermediation of pope Gregory III to urge the duke of *Venetiae* to mobilise his fleet in order to re-conquest Ravenna.[63] In the exarchal capital, the eclipse of the Byzantine governor brought out the leadership of the city's archbishop. He appears to assume the functions of territorial control and social organisation previously exercised by the exarch. Agnellus of Ravenna provides a realistic portrayal of this phenomenon by describing the power of Archbishop Sergius (ca. 748–769) as follows: »he, as an exarch, ruled everything from the borders of the whole Pentapolis and Persicetum up to the mouth of Tuscia and the Volano in the manner of the Romans« (»iste a finibus Persiceti totum Pentapolim et usque ad Tusciam et usque ad mensam Walani, veluti exarchus, sic omnia disponebat, ut sunt modo facere Romani«).[64] Therefore, starting from the second half of the 8th century, the area on which Ravenna could exercise its role as a centre of territorial organisation coincided, to a great extent, with the boundaries of the landed patrimony of the Blessed Apollinaris. A bitter confrontation ignited between the Ravennate archbishops and the popes: the holders of the other large agglomeration of estates and seigniorial jurisdictions existing in Italy in that period. The political and economic interests of both sides clashed for control over the former Byzantine territories of the Exarchatus (western Romagna) and the Pentapolis (southern Romagna and Marche). In the transition between the Lombard and Frankish rule of the peninsula, the policy followed by the archbishops of Ravenna from Leo to George – between the 770s and 840s – seems to be characterised by an opening disposition towards both the Frankish kingdom and Byzantium.[65] The first represented the new hegemonic power over the peninsula; its support was crucial to the arch-

59 See Cosentino (2005) 427–428, and especially Cirelli (2007), (2008) 131–137.

60 For fine wools and Apulian purple (from Taranto and Otranto), see Baldini (forthcoming).

61 In the 6th century, two silk merchants (*olosiricopratai*) are mentioned to have been in Ravenna: the first is the son of an Antiochene, and the other is probably of Antiochen origins as well: see Cosentino (2000), s.v. Georgius[5] (son of Iulianus, coming from Antioch); Cosentino (forthcoming), Prosopografia dell'Italia bizantina III, s.v. Theodolus.

62 Cosentino (2008) 138–141.

63 Cosentino (2000), s.v. »Eutychius[9]«; PmbZ, n. 1870.

64 Agn., 159, ll. 180–183 (ed. Deliyannis) 337.

65 For more on this, see Cosentino (2012b), esp. 287–291.

bishops of Ravenna, so that they were able to exercise their lordship over the Exarchate and the Pentapolis. Archbishop Leo (ca. 770 – ca. 777), a fierce opponent of Pope Adrian I, sought a cordial and direct relationship with Charlemagne. In a letter from the *Codex Carolinus*, Leo claims that his power over Ravenna, Faenza, Forlimpopoli, Forlì, Cesena, Comacchio, Ferrara, Bologna and Imola had been awarded to him directly by the Frankish king.[66] Leo's successors agreed that the still living memory of Ravenna's Roman past (its churches, palaces and marble statues) was a kind of merchandise in exchange for the support of the Carolingians. Around the year 787, Charles carried off part of the architectural treasures of the city in order to re-allocate them to Aachen, the new *sedes regia*.[67] It seems that on this occasion a large equestrian statue of Theodoric made its way to the Frankish capital, which Charles had placed in his palace.[68] Moreover, the perspective from which the archbishops of Ravenna tended to combine politics with the authority derived from their ministry teachings continued to operate in the wake of cooperation between temporal and spiritual power typical of Byzantine culture. Such a perspective was much closer to the way Charles and his successors understood the relationship to the episcopate than to the ideology of the primacy of Saint Peter.

We lack adequate documentation to specifically define the relationship that existed, during the second half of the 8th century, between the archbishops of Ravenna and the *basileis*. The Byzantine Empire of this period was, militarily speaking, weak in the northern Adriatic. But in the days of Archbishop Leo (ca. 770–777), it could not be ruled out that, at some point in the future, as was the case in the early 9th century, Byzantium will not have been in a position to send its fleets across the waters of the Adriatic.[69] The *stratēgos* of Sicily was very active in southern Italy, including Naples, Benevento and Calabria, in supporting a possible return of the Lombards to the Italian scene (as was, indeed, the case in the unfortunate expedition of Adelchi in 787).[70] Archbishop Leo had to approach the Carolingians, therefore, with caution because a return of the eastern Roman empire in the region was always a real possibility. The basis for the concrete exercise of temporal powers was founded both by the Church of Ravenna and the Papacy on their landed patrimonies.[71] The system of management for these large agglomerations of estates continued to be featured in the economic structures formed during the Byzantine period. With regard to monetary circulation, for example, it is possible that the large quantities of gold circulating in the northern Adriatic region between the second half of the 8th and the first half of the 9th centuries was fuelled (in part) by the rents in *nomismata* that the Ravennate archbishops continued to extract from their estates in Sicily.[72] In fact, by the end of the 7th century, the Byzantine mint's capacity to circulated coins had been substantially reduced and limited to the hinterland of the city and the northern Adriatic rim.[73] If taxation related to capitation disappeared by transforming itself into rent, the whole collection of indirect taxes was probably received in large part by the archbishops.[74] Together with an aristocratic class, they controlled the former exarchal territories. And much like aristocrats, they owed much of their power and economic status to the preceding regime. This aristocracy was formed, to a great extent, by the heirs of the Byzantine high officials, who had had jurisdiction over local communities between the 6th and the first half of the 8th century. With the demise of the Byzantine government, the aristocracy inherited a position of dominance that it tried to perpetuate. The economic base of such an élite was strengthened by the leasing of land from the Church of Ravenna. In the 9th century, some of its members had become an armed retinue of the Ravennate archbishops.[75]

66 *Cod. Car.*, n. 49. See also the brilliant article by Nelson (forthcoming).

67 *Cod. Car.*, n. 81 (*musiva et marmora* from Ravenna); regarding the letter, see the comment by Hack (2007) 839–843.

68 The information is referred to by Eginar. *Vita Kar.*, 26 (ed. Pertz 1829).

69 With regard to this, see the article by Prigent (2008), esp. pp. 399–400.

70 See von Falkenhausen (1983) 258–259.

71 Rome: Marazzi (1998). Ravenna: Fasoli (1991); Pasquali (1993), esp. 84–85; Mancassola (2008).

72 Cosentino (2012c) 423–426.

73 At least this is G. Gorini's view, Gorini (1992) 209–238. Regarding the mint of Ravenna, see the recent article by Morrisson / Callegher (2014).

74 Santos Salazar (2011).

75 On this aspects, see Carile (1983), (1985), (1992b); Vespignani (2001), esp. 91–99, (2010).

During the 8th century, Ravenna lost its former role as policy coordinator for the entire Peninsula by being limited to only the territories over which the archbishops directly exercised their lordship. This phenomenon coincided with another major transformation – this time, economic in nature. Until the end of the 7th century, through the harbour of Classe, the city was able to attract a huge quantity of goods from different production sites from throughout the eastern Mediterranean. However, around the mid-7th century, its naval infrastructure began experiencing a decline.[76] In the 8th century, what had once been a major Mediterranean commercial port was now a town populated by a few dozen people engaged in small artisanal activities.[77] Trade between the upper Adriatic and the East continued – albeit on a much smaller scale, e. g., by a different kind of amphorae and by limiting the production sites to just a few locations – but they were redirected mainly to Comacchio and Venice.[78] The port receptivity of post-Byzantine Ravenna was most likely reduced to a series of, more or less, organised landing sites of a very limited size and whose function was primarily aimed at redistributing the goods produced by the patrimony of the Church of Ravenna. The *negotiatores* that appear frequently in the Ravennate documents of the 9th and 10th centuries are not professionals engaged in international trade, like those Antiochenes who in the 6th century traded in silk, but rather modest actors involved in regional trade consisting of a few items of large consumption.[79] During the 10th century, the loss of maritime contact and the peculiar interests of its archbishops impressed upon the city an economic vocation markedly land-orientated and a political horizon focused quite exclusively on Emilia, Romagna and Marche.

From Late Antiquity to the early Middle Ages, two basic factors shaped Ravenna's ability to politically, religiously and economically influence a much more extensive space than its natural hinterland and to attract goods coming in from remote production sites. The first was its establishment as an imperial residence; in other words, to have been the centre of a political power characterised by a universal vocation or, in any case, by large territorial ambitions. The second was its location within a regional space, such as the northern Adriatic basin, that had since Antiquity been a crossroads for peoples, trade and cultures. Both its urban development and social structure were deeply influenced by these two characteristics that, over time, combined both politics and economy. As a consequence of having become a *sedes imperii*, it was endowed with a palatial complex and the monumental infrastructure relevant to a city with such a status. It housed both bureaucratic and military elements in the service of the court. Just on the basis of the support it received from the political power, its episcopate was elevated to one of the most important ecclesiastical sees of Italy. The peculiarities of the social structure of Ravenna consisted in the presence of a large class of individuals, the so-called *viri honesti*, which based its own economic well-being on the activities related to the state. By means of the large international harbour of Classe, Ravenna imported products from around the whole Mediterranean, whose consumption was only partially destined for the city. A series of canals allowed the goods to be transported from Classe to that great waterway that was the Po river and, through it, to be distributed amongst the towns of the Po valley. The Byzantine conquest of the city had repercussions for its political, religious, social and economic life that cannot be interpreted as mere elements of continuity with the experiences of the late Roman period. Rural property in the hands of the Ostrogoths changed ownership and became part of the assets of other proprietors. Thanks to the support it received from the Byzantine emperors, the Church of Ravenna acquired a considerable amount of land. Its landed patrimony constituted the basis for its future hegemonic position over Emilia, Romagna and Marche. Immigration of Greek-speaking elements affected, for the most part, high court officials, soldiers or merchants, yet had little impact on local population. However, with the arrival of the Byzantine government, the ties between the port of Classe and other the Mediterranean export centres shifted – essentially

76 Augenti / Cirelli (2010); Augenti (2011).
77 See Augenti (2010) 50.
78 Gelichi / Negrelli (2008); Negrelli (2012).
79 Cosentino, Tipologie, uomini e oggetti (forthcoming).

moving from the West to the East. The relationship to Constantinople elevated the political importance of Ravenna; it became the preferred place from which the court on the Bosphorus made itself heard when it came to ruling Italy. Yet, at the same time, the city was tightly fixed within the imperial hierarchy. In the eyes of the Byzantine rulers, Ravenna was a city as important as it was far from the heart of the empire. As long as these ties remained strong, Ravenna retained a vital contact to the other maritime trade centres, which enabled it to project itself into the broader economic scene of the eastern Mediterranean.

The twilight of Byzantine rule in northern Italy, however, did not cause the decline of the city, but rather a progressive turn of its ruling classes towards the political arena of the medieval West. From the end of the 9th century, some influential members of the Ravennate élite began weaving ties to aristocratic elements of Frankish origins.[80] The formation of this new aristocracy, more or less, matches with a renewed visibility of Ravenna in the Italian context and coincides with the reign of Louis II (844–875, emp. from 849) and his efforts against the Saracens. It was a time in which the theme of autocephaly of the Church of Ravenna, again, became a topic, especially under the episcopate of John VII (ca. 850 – 878; but for others, it was John VIII). It is possible that the archbishops thought to exploit the tension between the Church of Rome and that of Constantinople; a tension that arose due to the Photian schism, which was an occasion to carve out new spaces of autonomy for their own church.[81] What is certain is that the patriarch Photius, as in the days of monothelitism, tried to involve the see of Ravenna against the Papacy.[82] Although the lay aristocracy in the former Exarchal and Pentapolitan territories became stronger during this period and had disagreements with the archbishops, the latter remained the main political actors in the region.

Ravenna's Roman past continued to be featured in the cityscape during the high Middle Ages thanks, in no small part, to the still living memory of its former prestigious monuments.[83] Ravenna, however, did not remain crystallised in its late antique image, in terms of an open-air museum. Even in the second half of the 8th century, which was the lowest point of urban building investments, very likely at least three significant interventions were carried out in the episcopal complex and a new edifice was added to it by Archbishop Valerio (789–802/803), the so-called *domus Valeriana*.[84] By virtue of being the management centre of the *patrimonium beati Apollinaris*, the city continued to remain wealthy and influential well beyond the 9th century.[85] This was due both to the economic power of its archbishops and to their political alliance (first) with the Ottonians and then later with the Salian and Swabian emperors.[86] While this fourth "imperial« history of the city – after the late antique, Byzantine and Carolingian – is as important as the preceding ones, it is outside the scope of the present article. Otto I had a new palace built using materials from the walled city, not far from the *Sancti Laurentii* Gate, which continued to be used until around 1176.[87] Almost unbroken, from the 10th – 13th centuries, Germanic emperors emphasised the importance of the city by frequently paying visits to it.[88] A 13th century Italian author informs us that on the occasion of Frederick II's stay in Ravenna, in 1232, the emperor even undertook some sort of archaeological excavations in a monastery near Ravenna and discovered an *archa* with the spoils of Theodosius the Great.[89] Throughout the centuries, its archbishops always sided with the emperors. The trajectories of the political centrality of Ravenna

80 This is demonstrated, for instance, by the wedding celebrated between Martinus *dux* and the *comitissa* Ingelrada (or Angelrada) after 870 and before 889. Regarding this episode and its political implications, see: Rinaldi (1996).

81 See Savigni (1992), esp. 345–347.

82 Lanzoni (1918–1919).

83 For more information on the Roman past in the cultural memory of Ravenna in Carolingian, post-Carolingian and Ottonian ages, see Savigni (2005); and Deliyannis (2010) 295–299. For the monuments of the city: Verhoeven (2011). See also, with regard to this topic, the article by Orselli (2005).

84 They are the so-called »domus Felicis infra episcopium«, an entrance chamber known as *Salutatorium* together with a *vivarium*: Cirelli (2008) 146–149; Deliyannis (2010) 294.

85 See Cirelli (2015).

86 For the relationships between Ravenna and the Ottonians, see: Vasina (2005); Brown (forthcoming).

87 Cirelli (2008) 144–146; Otto, however, had at least one other residence in Classe sited in an edifice near the monastery of Saint Severus.

88 See Zimmermann (1993), esp. 108.

89 See the tale narrated by Thomae Tusci *Gesta imperatorum et pontificum* (ed. Ehrenfeuchter, 1872) 511–512.

from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages were, therefore, deeply influenced by the dynamics of successive empires, which, in one form or another, were all connected or attempted to re-connect to the memory of its Roman past. This imperial imagery of Ravenna was an important trait of its urban perception by those outside the city. It did not fade between the 9th and the middle of the 13th centuries, and it did not represent, for the city, a mere myth for its survival.

■

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